SCHOOLS

Ambrose regains ‘School of Recognition’ title, principal credits school community for academic success

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

March 12, 2026 . 6:00 AM — 3 min read

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Pedro Martinez, left, Winchester Superintendent of Schools Dr. Frank Hackett, Ambrose School Principal Andrea Phelan and Mass. Secretary of education Patrick Tutwiler at a ceremony where Winchester received its ‘School of Recognition’ COURTESY PHOTO/ANDREA PHELAN

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Everyone likes to be recognized for their efforts and the Ambrose School is no different. The school recently received an A from the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), being named a School of Recognition.

"It's very exciting," said Ambrose Principal Andrea Phelan.

A School of Recognition is an honor bestowed by DESE on a handful of schools that "demonstrate progress toward annual accountability targets, with an emphasis on improved achievement in ELA (English language arts) and math."

Which is to say it's based largely on MCAS scores, so while she is excited, Phelan said, she doesn't actually like to celebrate the honor too much because MCAS scores can be complex at best.

"Truth be told, we were a School of Recognition before COVID," she said. "We had some difficulties during COVID."

The Ambrose was named a School of Recognition for the 2018-2019 school year.

"It was my first year as principal, but I couldn't take credit for it," Phelan said, noting the honor was based on the previous year's MCAS scores.

Then in 2020 schools were shuttered when the pandemic swept in and classes went remote with online teaching. It kept students in school, so to speak, but achievement growth suffered not just at Ambrose or in Winchester, but across the nation.

Phelan said while the shutdown did impact the schools, she believes they all have most definitely turned a corner since those days of remo teaching.

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“Teachers are doing an amazing job honing in on addressing needs and exactly what those needs are,” she said. “And I think that’s happened across all the schools in Winchester.”

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Still the caveat to the School of Recognition honor is the complexity of the MCAS tests, she said, which is merely “a snapshot of a student on a given day.”

Phelan said every kid that comes to Ambrose comes with a different heartbeat. Some are good at math, some are good at art or music and next year, with different students, things could look very different, she said.

Isn’t MCAS over?

In 2024, voters backed Question 2 to end the use of MCAS as a graduation requirement. But, Phelan said students still participate in the standardized testing.

She calls it just another assessment tool, a way to measure how students are doing but said it doesn’t take all their work into account. There are times where the MCAS scores and writing samples are pretty good, but in their view the entire picture of what students are doing is outstanding, she said.

Winchester schools are lucky, she added, in that they have a number of assessment tools, both formative and summative to keep on top of student achievement.

It takes a community

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Phelan was also quick to say that the honor of being a School of Recognition really has nothing to do with the principal. She got to go to a ceremony at the State House, along with Superintendent Dr. Frank Hackett and receive a certificate from state Rep. Michael Day, but the hard work to get there, that's done by everyone else, she said.

It is, in fact, the school community she credits – students, teachers, support staff and parents.

"We are truly blessed at Ambrose, we have a great community" she said.

Phelan has been in the district for a long time. She jokes she is the oldest of the elementary principals. She did her student teaching at Lincoln, taught at Muraco, did AP at Lynch and is now principal at the Ambrose School. Vinson-Owen is the only elementary school she has not worked at, she said.

"I've had a journey," she said. "And I think all our schools are awesome and my colleagues are doing amazing work.

Chris Stevens is an award-winning journalist who has spent 25 years chasing, editing and photographing stories on the North Shore. She is the co-founder and managing editor of Gotta Know Medford.

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Winchester’s successful Science Olympiad Club competes at national-level tournaments

Winchester’s Science Olympiad, like most things, began small. Yet what began as a modest club for fun, has grown into something respected by the entire Science Olympiad community throughout the nation. Every Friday, dedicated Winchester High School students gather for two hours in weekly club meetings, to prepare for

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Winchester High student Lucas Yang heads to Capitol on Senate Youth Program

Being called to the principal’s office usually means trouble. For Lucas Yang, sitting in his principal’s office was nerve-racking for a different reason. Sitting there in early December, he learned he had been chosen as one of two Massachusetts students in the U.S. Senate Youth Program. Two

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Science abounds at Winchester’s Ambrose School during first in a

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Winchester resident, student joins ‘The Movement

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generation fair

You could blame the Muraco School for the fact that the Ambrose cafeteria became the site of a raucously rambunctious science fair on March 5. “They were the inspiration,” said parent volunteer Karen Kinnaman, who spearheaded the event. “They put on a huge science fair every year.” Kinnaman said it’

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

March 10, 2026

Family’

The following was submitted by Austin Preparatory School: Brady McLaren ’26, of Winchester, spends his Wednesday nights serving others. The Austin Prep junior, who attends the independent Catholic school in Reading, travels each week with classmates to volunteer with The Movement Family, a grassroots nonprofit founded by Michael Gorman that

March 5, 2026

Latest

NEWS

Winchester ZBA waives town regulations to move Washington/Swanton project along

Town officials have approved waivers of regulations for a residential/commercial development project at Washington and Swanton streets. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on March 19 approved the waivers for a 40B project at 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. in a special meeting preceding a

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NEWS

John Bellaire, 22, among youngest townwide winners in Winchester history

He won all eight precincts after a door-to-door campaign that emphasized direct voter contact over institutional backing.

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EVENTS

Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

March 25, 2026

EVENTS

Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

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